

Minutes 2016.03.09

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Commissioners Present: Paul C. DeMaio Chairman, Marshall L. Harris Vice Chairman, Joseph M. Prior Clerk

Employees Present: Superintendent: Craig W. Jalbert; Secretary: Dale Barnes-Johnson

Open the Meeting: The meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m.

Accept the Meeting Minutes: Marty made a motion to accept the meeting minutes of February 24, 2016. Joe seconded and it was unanimously voted.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS:

Petition for Abatement: Rosemary Crowley, Esq. of Doherty, Wallace, Pillsbury and Murphy, P.C. filed a Petition for Abatement of Water and Sewer Charges on behalf of Raymond Lavallee, President of Ray's Mobile Home Park, Inc. who is in attendance. Craig read the petition received February 19, 2016 for the property served by the utility for the mobile home park located at 268 Palmer Road in Monson, Account #0992, Bill Date 01/22/2016, Billing Period from 09/28/2015 to 12/30/2015 Amount of Bill \$19,926.50. Amount of Abatement requested: "Amount in excess of normal usage". Reason for abatement request: "The bill for the comparable period of 09/29/14 to 01/02/15 was \$10,780".

Craig presented the details to the Commission: The bill specified in the petition dated 1/22/16 was checked and verified to be accurate and free from mistakes in regard to the meter reads on which that bill was based. On 09/28/2015 the total usage read at the meter was 62,180,000 gal and on 12/30/2015 the total usage read on the meter was 65,260,000 gal. As per industry practice, usage for the billing period specified in the petition was calculated by subtracting the previous read from the current reading which equals 3,080,000 gallons. 3,080,000 multiplied by the water rate (\$4.75/1,000 gal) at the time of the bill equals \$14,630 for water usage charges. All billing for water in the Town of Monson is based solely on water usage as measured through the meter and the amount of the bill will vary with that usage. Current usage is always printed on the bill and meters have been read quarterly for 15 years. All customers are responsible for all usage that passes through the water meter. There are many post meter factors that may contribute to varying levels of usage such as leaks that continue unabated for a protracted period of time, lawn watering, faulty plumbing fixtures (i.e. leaky/running toilets) or tenant's intentionally allowing water to run. Post meter factors are completely the responsibility of the owner. Ray questioned if volume discounts were given for high users, Marty responded that over 30 years ago there were such discounts, however times have changed and present law prohibits volume discounts in the interest of conservation.

Review of the accounts reading history indicates inconsistent levels of usage with many ups and downs. Craig pointed out that the three previous bills Ray received and paid were elevated in comparison to the history and should have prompted some investigation on Ray's part. Ray expressed his concern about the three month reading timeframe, reasoning he would not know if a pipe had blown after the last bill until the next bill therefore would like the park read weekly to track usage. Without an electronic reader, the meter for the park is not easily accessible and requires lifting of a cover and going down into a manhole. Craig is apprehensive to have Ray open the cover to go into the manhole to record his own reads for safety reasons. Ray requested reader information so that he could purchase one himself to take weekly reads. Prior to the 1/22/16 bill being mailed a review of the December reads indicated usage was up at Ray's Park. Tom Murphy went out on 01/11/2016 to alert the customer and advised him to begin leak detection work and make repairs as soon as possible. In the ensuing weeks, Ray contacted the department several times expressing distress about the last bill and then later reported two repairs had taken place. In an effort to assist, Craig volunteered to go out and read the meter on Fridays to determine if usage had dropped. As it stands now the park is on pace for 700,000 gallons of usage for an entire quarter, however because repairs had not taken place until later in the quarter, usage is already at 2,720,000 gallons which in turn will lead to another high bill this next quarter.

Marty pointed out the actual amount due for the water portion of the bill is \$14,630.00 the petition refers to the total amount of the bill \$19,926.50 which includes flat rate based sewer billing. Ray's Mobile Home Park has 61 residential units; each residential dwelling unit is billed \$86.50/quarter/unit which equals \$5,276.50 for sewer charges and should not be factored into the petition. Discussion took place regarding available options, Craig explored possibilities with the Assessor's office and explained the Commission has only two choices, either grant or deny the petition for abatement. Ray informed the Commission his attorney wants to move along, Paul asked if his intentions were to litigate, Ray confirmed yes and at that point the Commission chose to end discussions. The Commission agreed that it is Ray's choice to purchase his own reader to monitor usage but it is not up to the department to provide this monitoring service. The Commission understands Ray's situation but are also very cognizant of setting a precedent if the abatement was granted, and with that Ray thanked them for their time and departed.

Joe made a motion to deny the abatement based on insufficient reasons for abatement. Marty seconded the motion and it was unanimously voted. The Commission will respond in writing to the petition within 10 days.

Hospital Road Pump Rehab Project ~ the motor control center is on order, when it arrives the project can start.

FY2017 Budget ~ Craig met with FinCom Monday, February 29th to go over the budgets as proposed by the Commission. No major questions regarding the increase to the Palmer Wastewater Treatment line item. Questions were raised regarding the water budget increase to hire outside contractors; Craig explained the department is presently out of compliance with MassDEP staffing requirements. It is Craig and the Commission's responsibility to keep the department in compliance with the laws and regulations that govern public water systems, protecting the department and Town from any potential liabilities. The department has experienced abnormal turnover due to submarket pay levels and the recent salary survey has made the condition worse. Craig felt FinCom had a pretty good understanding of the situation by the time he left. Article requests are due April 4, 2016 and Craig expects to meet with FinCom again to discuss. Tentatively article requests include:

- Routine Water & Sewer Retained Earning transfers
- \$3,800 for pavement repairs to entrance at Bunyan Road Station
- Funds to cover engineering costs for Tata & Howard (T&H) to research all pipe crossings and develop specs for needed repairs (i.e. broken hangers and missing insulation). FEMA funding is not an option, it may be manageable to do one or two a year or it may be cheaper to do all at once, it depends on costs, all are Town owned.
- Parco maintenance (replace/rebuild piston) at Bunyan Road Station, replace pilot control on relief valve at Bethany for better functionality and purchase hydrant relief valve for emergency operations. Ballpark estimate is \$5,000.
- Sewer - Interest for Interim Financing on USDA project \$5,000
- Sewer – Possibly transfer additional funds to Easement Clearing (Wilbraham Road/Homer Drive easement).

Department Activity

Bethany Road Station Power Loss~ Tom got called out early morning 2/25/16. Tree went down taking power lines with it and as a result broke two of the connections to the three transformers that supply power to our building. National Grid didn't realize we were still out of service when they left and the outage reporting system for Grid was also not functioning well. Eventually a crew was dispatched to us in the afternoon and they repaired the problem in 30 minutes. It was a good learning experience for all of our crew in regard to how the electrical connections to all of our buildings are done.

Station Maintenance ~ brush clearing is almost complete at the Hospital Road Pump Station.

Library Demo ~ work to complete the service disconnection is expected to take place this spring as agreed.

Palmer Road ~ milling and repaving will be underway shortly.

NEXT MEETING: The next meeting has been set for Wednesday March 23, 2016, at 3:30 p.m.

ADJOURN: A motion was made by Joe and seconded by Marty to adjourn at 4:30 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Joseph M. Prior, Clerk
cc: Selectmen